

RESEARCH NOTE**A STUDY ON THE ADAPTATION OF
LATIN-AMERICAN NIKKEIS IN JAPAN**

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SUMMARY

An exploratory investigation was done in order to identify the problem of adaptation of Latin-American Nikkeis in Japan. Seven Latin-American Nikkeis were interviewed individually, and asked about their situations, experiences, feelings, and opinions of the life in Japan and in their countries. The results revealed that there are crucial differences between Japan and their countries, especially in the social environment and the human relations, and that the "Japan" that they learned from their families and through massmedia is different from the "Japan" that they are actually observing. These differences seem to result in the decline in the consciousness of being descendant of Japanese and to be the source of the problems of adaptation in Japan.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays it is not uncommon that one lives outside his home country with a certain reason. And it often has a great impact on his life, since he has to, more or less, make efforts to adjust his life to the new environment. The differences in idiom, customs, social norms, etc. between the home and the host countries may cause the obstacles to the adaptation in the new environment. So the life in the new environment becomes more stressful than that in the old environment. Especially in the case that there are large cultural differences between two environments, a great amount of efforts is needed to cope with the new setting. Many investigations have been done on the process of adaptation to the new environment. In these studies it has been reported that the many factors, for example, material, cultural, social, and psychological ones are concerned in the adaptation process, and that when one can not adapt himself to the new environment, he suffers various psychological and social problems (Nicassio, 1985).

In these years the number of foreign people who come to Japan for the purpose of study or work is markedly increasing. It is likely that they have problems of adaptation due to

the cultural differences. And it seems to be the case especially for those who come from the western countries. Lots of Nikkeis (descendants of Japanese migrants) are also coming to Japan from Latin-American countries. Some of them come to Japan to study with scholarship, and the others to work. Considering the differences between the Japanese culture and the Latin-American one, it is possible that they have problems of adaptation to the Japanese society, although they are supposed to be more accustomed to the Japanese culture than other foreigners. For example, not many Nikkeis who come to Japan have a high level of Japanese proficiency, and the insufficient ability of language may yield the problems in their life in Japan. Also Japan is conceived to be a monocultural society, compared with the Latin-American countries. This characteristic of the Japanese society may make it more difficult for the Nikkeis to adjust themselves to the new life in Japan, because there is some evidence that the migrants have less problems in the multicultural environment (Murphy, 1975). Considering the increasing number of the Nikkeis in Japan, their adaptation to the Japanese society is considered to be an important problem. But few researches on it are found, although there are several investigations on Japanese migrants in other countries (Padilla et al., 1985; Hayashi, 1987).

The purpose of this investigation is to understand better the problems of their adaptation in Japan and to provide an information about them in order that they might have less difficulties of adapting themselves to the Japanese society, which, on the other hand, will help us to understand better the characteristics of the Japanese society and the Japanese people. To begin with, in this report the problems of adaptation that the Nikkeis actually have in Japan were analyzed qualitatively through the interview with them.

METHOD

Subjects: Four male and three female Latin-American Nikkeis who live in the city of Sendai served as subjects in this research. Four of them are niseis (second generation), and one is sansei (third generation). And the other two have the father of issei (first generation), and the mother of nisei. They vary in the age from 25 to 50 years old, and the mean age is 30. The periods of stay in Japan range between 3 and 36 months, and the mean is 16 months. Four of them came to Japan to study with scholarship and the other three are working in Japan.

Procedure: The subjects were interviewed individually in their house or in the authors' house in order that they might talk in a relaxed atmosphere. They were interviewed in the way that they liked. In some cases they were asked directly about the topics described below one after another, and in the other cases certain topics were mentioned and the interviewees talked about them freely. The interview was done in Spanish or Portuguese, and it was recorded with a tape recorder. It took about from one to one and a half hour for the interview with each subject.

The topics which were taken up in the interview are divided into three parts. The first part is about the fundamental data of subjects: age, nationality, profession, academic

career, proficiency of Japanese language, etc. The second part refers to the matters in their countries: family (year of immigration, ages and professions of their parents and brothers), customs in their houses (religion, use of Japanese language, cloths, food, education, annual event, etc.), social relations in the neighborhood, school, university, place of work, etc., image and knowledge about Japan that they had in their countries, motive to come to Japan, evaluation on their countries, and consciousness of being Nikkei before the visit to Japan. The third part concerns the themes in Japan: first impression about the Japanese society and the Japanese people when they arrived at Japan, social relations in the university, place of work, etc., communication in Japanese, problems with Japanese customs, problems in the study or in the work, evaluation on the Japanese society and the Japanese people, degree of achievement of their objective to come to Japan, consciousness of being Nikkei that they have now, and intention to live in Japan in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of the interviews were analyzed qualitatively and individually, and the general results that were obtained are summarized as follows.

Japanese language: In many investigations it has been indicated that the language proficiency is one of the most important factors in the process of adaptation to the new environment (Baker, 1986; Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Leclézio et al., 1986; Nicassio et al., 1986).

In their houses all the interviewees speak Spanish or Portuguese with their brothers. With their parents, in the case that the parents are issei, they speak Japanese. On the other hand, in the case that the parents are nisei, they use the native language of their countries. In sum, although in the house of Nikkeis the Japanese language is maintained, its use lessens with a descent of the generation. The Japanese language is spoken mainly by the isseis, and among the nisseis and the sanseis the native language of their countries is used more than Japanese.

Six subjects have learned the Japanese language in Japanese schools or with their parents (or grandparents), when they were children. Almost all the subjects said that they were interested in learning Japanese. And four of seven interviewees are now studying Japanese in the course of the university or the public institution.

As to the level of proficiency of the Japanese language, only one subject has no difficulty of communication in Japanese. But the level of spoken Japanese of the other six is intermediate, and they do not speak Japanese fluently. They do not have the sufficient vocabular and grammatical knowledge and have to seek, with an effort, the words or the expressions that they want to say. All the subjects have problems in reading and writing Japanese. They do not read the newspaper or the books in Japanese easily. Especially it is difficult for them to read and write Kanjis (Chinese characters). The numbers of Kanjis that they know vary between 200 and 2000. All the interviewees think that although they do not have much problem of language for the daily communication, their Japanese is not

sufficient for the study or the work, and that they need to learn it more.

Maintenance of Japanese customs in their countries: In all cases they reported that in their houses they have a mixture of the Japanese culture and the culture of their countries. For example, while they celebrate the Christmas, they also congratulate themselves on the new year preparing the rice cake which is one of the Japanese customs. Their mothers prepare at times the Japanese food in the house. Their families like to listen to the Japanese songs, which is common not only among isseis but also among niseis and sanseis. Many of them have also a family Buddhist altars in their house, although many niseis and sanseis are Catholic. Especially in the case of an Okinawan family, they maintain the traditional Okinawan funeral ceremonies very rigidly. Almost all the subjects said that they received the Japanese education from their parents and that the attitude of their parents to them was different from that of the parents of the other ethnic groups. All of them felt that the atmosphere of their houses was somewhat different from that of the house of their native friends. As described above, it is shown that, as a whole, the Nikkei families, in some way, maintain the Japanese custom and tradition.

In addition, in six cases their parents like their sons and daughters to marry with Japanese or with Nikkei. Four subjects said that they preferred the marriage with Nikkei, but none of the interviewees showed the preference for the marriage with Japanese. It seems that their parents, especially the isseis, want their children to maintain the Japanese culture.

Images about Japan: All the interviewees said that, of their countries, they liked the people, the way of life, and the natural environment, and that they disliked the economic problem and the lack of social and political stability. Through the information from massmedia and their families, all of them had very positive images about Japan in all aspects before they came to Japan. In their country the Nikkei people, in general, receive the positive evaluation from the native people and many of them have good social and economic positions, compared with the native people. The Nikkeis have a fame that they are honest, industrious, etc. And they are proud of it, which also seems to strengthen their positive image of Japan.

But after living for a certain period in Japan, they underwent considerable changes in their images of Japan, and the images that they have now are very contrastive to those of their countries. On the material aspects their images have not changed. All of them have the positive impression on the economic development, the high level of technology, the social and political stability, and the social organization in general. But they all indicated the negative evaluation on the aspects of the Japanese human and social relations. Generally speaking, they think that the Japanese people are honest and kind, but very closed and not spontaneous, and that it is more difficult for them to have Japanese friends than Latin-American ones. This result is consistent with the finding of Inoue (1987) which suggested the passive attitude of Japanese youths toward the intercourse with foreigners. Moreover the interviewees feel that the Japanese human relations are very complicated and constrained.

Adaptation in Japan: Obviously there exist large differences in customs, social norms, etc. between Japan and the Latin-American countries. And it is proposed that these differences may be related to the adaptation difficulties (Berry, 1980). All the interviewees

reported that in the earlier period they had been, more or less, confused at those differences. But on the material aspects, they have been accustomed to the life in Japan, and none of them does not have serious problem.

One problem that most subjects mentioned is the difficulties in the communication with the Japanese people. In the conversation between the Japanese people and the subjects at times occurs the misunderstanding or the lack of understanding. As described above, it seems to result partly from the insufficient linguistic knowledge of Japanese language of the subjects. But also all of them remarked that they had problems with the unique Japanese style of communication which they are not accustomed to. That is, firstly they feel the difficulty of using different expressions that reflect the hierarchical social relations. It makes them worry about making mistakes, especially when they talk with some person of superior social position, for example the professor or the chief of the company. Secondly, they also have the difficulty of understanding indirect or euphemistic expressions in Japanese. Many times the interviewees are not sure whether they understood well what the Japanese people meant. Or when the interviewees ask some question to the Japanese people, the answer often looks very ambiguous to them. It is conceived that these difficulties make their life more stressful.

Another problem that they indicated is the social and human relations in Japan. The majority of the interviewees reported that in their countries they had not only Nikkei friends but also friends of native people. But here in Japan they do not have many Japanese friends. Most of the friends that they have now in Japan are foreigners or Nikkeis. With the Japanese people of the same laboratory or of the place of work they sometimes go out to eat and/or drink together, but the relation between the interviewees and their Japanese fellows seems to be very superficial. The subjects have few Japanese friends with whom they can talk about their feelings, problems, etc. When they have questions in their study or work, Japanese people kindly help them. However it seems difficult for them to have deep emotional relations with Japanese people. But none of the subjects mentioned, as a main reason of not having many Japanese friends, the insufficient ability of Japanese language. Most of them think that the Japanese people are closed and that it may be the principal cause. In the Latin-American countries it is usual that one talks freely about his wishes, feelings, thinkings, and opinions to the other people. On the other hand here in Japan the people hardly express them clearly, which seems to make Nikkeis think that the Japanese people are not open. Also they mentioned a large difference in the idea of privacy. According to them, the Japanese people frequently talk to the others about the personal things of the third person, which is conceived to be undesirable in their countries and disturbs them. It is usual that when the subject talks about his things to one Japanese, in a few days many people will know about them. So the subjects are likely to become deffensive and to avoid to speak about their personal things to the Japanese people. In this aspect the interviewees do not have much confidence in them. And it also hinder them from having deep human relations with Japanese people. As seen above, the difficulty of having Japanese friends does not arise mainly from the problem of language, but from the differences in the custom and culture between Japan and the Latin-American countries.

Similar results were reported in the other investigations (Asakawa et al., 1981; Hicks & Yamamoto, 1981).

To the question about the intention to live in Japan in the future, five interviewees replied very clearly that they prefer their country to Japan. The answer of the other two was a little ambiguous. They replied that they might think of the possibility to live in Japan if they could have a good job.

Consciousness of being Nikkei: The population of each Latin-American country consists of various ethnic groups. And it is plausible that one feels that he is, in some sense, different from the people of the other ethnic groups, because each group is supposed to maintain their culture, custom, and tradition. In the case of Nikkeis, all the interviewees also reported that before they came to Japan, in their countries they felt that they were different from the people of the other groups. It is because, in one part, their physical characteristics are different from the other people. In the other part, it is because their families maintain their custom and tradition. At the same time the other groups consider that the Nikkeis are different from themselves, and treat them as Nikkei. So it is clear that all the subjects had, more or less, the consciousness of being Nikkei, although its degrees varied among them. Out of the seven interviewees, five felt that they were more Japanese than Latin-American, and the other two identified themselves more with Latin-American than with Japanese.

But after they came to Japan, there occurred a notable change in their consciousness of being Nikkei. Although the subjects differed in the extent of the change, all of them reported the decline in the consciousness of being Nikkei. That is, they feel that they are less Japanese now than when they stayed in their countries. They seem to notice more clearly the differences in many aspects, for example the way of life, the mode of thinking, etc., between Japanese people and them. Moreover some of them indicated that they feel that the treatment of the Japanese people with them is different from that with the other Japanese. That is, they think that Japanese people in some way distinguish themselves from Nikkeis. In this sense they also feel that they are somewhat different from the Japanese people, although they have the same physical characteristics as the Japanese people. But what is more interesting is that they think that there is some difference between the behavior of the Japanese people with them and that with the non-Nikkei foreigners. So they feel that they are not pure Japanese nor pure foreigner. Anyway the Nikkeis seem to have the feeling of alienation here in the country of their origin, which is conceived to result in the decline in the consciousness of being the descendant of Japanese.

Conclusional remarks: While the interviewees lived in their countries, they have got the very positive images of Japan in all aspects from their parents and through massmedia. Also in their countries Japan and Japanese immigrants have a good fame. So they arrive at Japan with a great illusion about the country which is considered to be their roots. But living here in Japan, they see the different figure of Japan that they did not expect, especially in the social and human aspects. They seem to be, to some extent, shocked by the difference between the image of Japan that they had before and the "Japan" that they are really observing. According to their comments, the image of Japan that they had

before seems to be the image of more than 30 or 40 years ago when their parents or their grandparents emigrated.

On the other hand, the subjects see that the way of life and the form of thinking of Japanese people are different from those of Latin-American people. Through the intercourse with the Japanese people in Japan, they become aware of the differences between the Japanese people and themselves, and realize more clearly than before that they are Latin-American.

These differences yield the decline in the consciousness of being the descendant of Japanese, and make them feel that it is more difficult to live in Japan than they imagined before.

The results of this investigation clarified some aspects of the problems of Nikkeis who live in Japan. But considering the small number of subjects, it is not sure how much the results obtained here can be generalized. Hereafter through the interviews with more subjects, we would like to analyze more in detail their problems and courses of adaptation.

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